

This record is a partial extract of the original cable. The full text of the original cable is not available.

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 KUWAIT 003860

SIPDIS

STATE FOR NEA/ARPI (DBERNS)
NEA/PPD (CWHITTLESEY)
NEA/PA (FFINVER)
ECA/P/V (CBROWN)
ECA/P/V/F (LWEBER)
ECA/P/C (LPEREZ)

E.O. 12958: DECL: 08/28/2015

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [KPAO](#) [KMDR](#) [PHUM](#) [KU](#)

SUBJECT: NEWS AGENCY HEAD QUESTIONS INFORMATION MINISTER'S
PLAN, SAYS GOVERNMENT NOT READY FOR PRESS CRITICISM

REF: A. KUWAIT 3704

[1](#)B. KUWAIT 3057

[1](#)C. KUWAIT 1493

Classified By: Ambassador Richard LeBaron for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

[1](#)1. (C) Summary: In an amiable, wide-ranging meeting between Ambassador and Mohammed Al-Ajeeri, the Director General of the Kuwait News Agency (KUNA), on August 26, the Director General discussed his thoughts on the Minister of Information's plan for restructuring the ministry, the status of a draft press and publications law, and the prospect of exchanges between American journalism organizations and schools and KUNA staff. Al-Ajeeri suggested that there would be a tug-of-war between himself and the minister over KUNA's fate in the proposed restructuring, and said that the fate of the draft law was uncertain because senior government officials would insist, against the wishes of parliamentarians, on mandating jail time for press law violations. End Summary.

"He Wants to Touch My Agency"

[1](#)2. (C) Al-Ajeeri visibly recoiled when Ambassador brought up the plan by Minister of Information Dr. Anas Al-Reshaid to restructure the ministry, of which KUNA is a part (ref. A and B). "He wants to touch my agency," Al-Ajeeri said distastefully. Al-Ajeeri stated that the plan was hastily prepared, because the minister, he speculated, was in a hurry to make an impact. Al-Ajeeri added that there were elements of the ministry that needed support, such as the television arm, and approved the concept of improving these, but said that the minister should not interfere in the workings of KUNA. The problem with the ministry, according to Al-Ajeeri, was that there were no provisions for firing bad workers, which had the dual result of institutionalizing unsatisfactory performers and sapping motivation from those willing to work hard. Al-Ajeeri pointed out that while KUNA, like the ministry at large, was unable to fire underperformers, the agency avoided a wider malaise with a system of merit-based promotions to maintain motivation and reward top performers.

Not Ready for Real Criticism

[1](#)3. (C) Asked by the Ambassador about the prospects for passage of a new press and publications law in Kuwait's upcoming legislative session, Al-Ajeeri expressed his misgivings. At issue, he stated, was a disagreement over appropriate punishment for violations of the law, such as libel. The government, Al-Ajeeri indicated, was insisting on jail time for violations, while parliamentarians are "against any punishment that results in prison." Because of this disagreement, Al-Ajeeri asserted, there would be no new press law for now.

[1](#)4. (C) The larger problem, he said, was that high-ranking officials are not ready to be criticized in a serious way. He argued that officials were "not fit for real democracy" -- real democrats, he noted, not only suffered criticism, but encouraged critics. "If you are a public person, I should criticize your work," Al-Ajeeri said.

Training and Exchanges

[1](#)5. (U) A discussion of professional exchanges and cooperative training ventures began and ended the meeting. Al-Ajeeri asked Ambassador to foster familiarization tours by KUNA reporters and administrators to the U.S., where they could meet with their counterparts at news agencies, journalism schools, and professional organizations to share expertise and best practices. Al-Ajeeri characterized these trips as "visits," rather than training, to "see what is going on," but also said that he would like to send some of his senior staffers for advanced training.

16. (U) Al-Ajeeri extolled the virtues of KUNA's own in-house training center, the KUNA Center for Training and Development of Media Skills, which offers introductory training for new employees and regular, five-week intensive training workshops in specialized areas. He said that U.S. expert visitors to the training center would be welcome, and encouraged cooperation on such efforts between the Embassy and the center's director, Lamia Al-Humaidhi, whom he called into the meeting towards the end, as training and exchanges once again came up in the discussion.

Visit Embassy Kuwait's Classified Website:
<http://www.state.sgov.gov/p/nea/kuwait/>

You can also access this site through the
State Department's Classified SIPRNET website

LEBARON